



Communication Disabilities Access Canada

The following is a transcript of audio segments for slides in this lesson.

Lesson 5 – Facilitating Communication at Meetings, Public Forums and Government Consultations

In this lesson, you will learn ways to facilitate communication at meetings and public consultation forums, either in-person or through written surveys.

Slide 1 – Accessible Meetings and Public Forums

People with communication disabilities want to provide input to public consultations on all issues, but especially on topics that are relevant to them. Organizations and government groups that host these meetings currently offer and pay for sign language interpreting, translation services, or attendant services. These organizations can now also offer communication assistance services if an individual with communication disability requests these supports.

In this lesson, we will focus on ways that a communication assistant can facilitate people communicating at public consultation forums, whether these are in person meetings or through written surveys.

The information here will be applicable for facilitating communication in other similar group situations, such as case conferences, board meetings, tenant association meetings, political or community gatherings.

Slide 3 – Communication Barriers at Meetings

When attending meetings, people who have communication disabilities tell us that they may not be able to interject in group discussions. For example, the meeting organizer may not know how they signal that they have something to communicate. Their messages may be out of sync with the discussion. As Colin mentioned in the last video, messages can be out of sync because he is preparing his message and at the same time the discussion has moved on to another topic.

They may miss out on what is being said when they are constructing their messages. They are either typing it on their device, or spelling it out for their assistant to read aloud, and when they are doing that they miss out on what the group is discussing at that time.

Some people, especially people who have acquired brain injuries, intellectual disabilities, or people who have aphasia after a stroke, may have difficulty following the content of a very fast pace discussion; because they may need more time to process what is being said, or they may need the information enhanced by visual supports, such as written words or pictures, or they may need the information provided in everyday language. People who have physical disabilities may need someone to take notes for them at a meeting or they may need to get the minutes of a meeting in formats that they can read or understand.

Slide 5 – Tips to Prepare for a Meeting

To prepare to assist a person at a meeting it is a good idea to get the agenda ahead of time. This helps you know what the gist or the context of the meeting is about. Knowing what the meeting is about is very useful when you are going to assist someone to communicate. Also ask the organizer to share the agenda with the person that you will be assisting so that they have an opportunity to prepare their thoughts, or construct their messages ahead of time.

Arrange to meet the person ahead of the meeting. If you do not know the person you are asked to assist, then Jared suggest that you meet with them at least 30 minutes before the meeting. He goes through the communication assistance form with a person he does not know, and you should have a copy of this form. We shared it with you in Lesson 2.

Find out if the person has prepared messages. You would want to go over these messages to see where they fit in the agenda and if you got any questions about this, it is a good idea to meet with the meeting moderator ahead of time.

Know the person's signal that they have something to communicate. Some people have very obvious signals and others have very subtle signals, like lifting an arm or a leg, or using eye gaze to signal that they have something to say.

Slide 7 – Tips for Assisting Communication at a Meeting

There are a number of ways you can assist a person communicating at a meeting. For example, together with the person you are assisting, meet the moderator before the event. Explain how the person you are assisting communicates and how they want to participate at the meeting. Find out how the moderator wants to conduct the meeting and if they want participants to stop talking and wait for the person to communicate their message during the meeting, or if they want to schedule a specific time during the meeting when everyone can contribute their opinions and questions, or if they want to wait until the end of the meeting for questions and answers.

Slide 8 – More Tips for Assisting Communication at a Meeting

Hold up your hand to signal to the moderator that the person wants to communicate something and keep your hand up as the person constructs their message. If appropriate,

provide quick phrase displays for the person to participate, and if required, take notes for the person during the meeting. Again, if required, negotiate if the person wants you to audio or video the meeting, and finally, find out if the person requires the meeting minutes in an alternate format, such as large print or electronic copy.

Slide 11 - Tips for Assisting with Questionnaires and Surveys

The person you are assisting may want you to help them read the form or questionnaire, or they may want you to assist them to understand the questions, or even to write their responses for them. Our instructor suggests that they may want you to ask for the form in a format that they can use, for example, plain language, large font or electronic copy. They may want you to hold and turn the pages of the hard copy as they read it. They may want you to read aloud the survey, form or questionnaire. They may want you to explain the questions using everyday language that they can understand, or they may want you to show them pictures when explaining what the questions mean.

Slide 12 – More Tips for Assisting with Questionnaires and Surveys

You should also find out if the person you are assisting want you to write or type their answers on the form as they dictate what they want to say, using either their speech or their communication display or device. It is important to check to see if they can save their answers on the form, if they want to take a break, because some forms are set up in ways that you have to complete everything, or you will lose what you have written if you move away from the form; and also, ask if they need any assistance with signing a document in alternate ways, such as an X, a thumb print or their signature stamp.